



## **Comments on Petition for Soda Mountain Area of Critical Environmental Concern** **April, 2015**

*“We have worked in partnership with BLM for decades to become a gateway community to the wild and beautiful country surrounding our desert town. Now, BLM is willing to industrialize a neighboring valley important for bighorn sheep, for tourism, for education, and for our water supply. Did they ask us to protect resources just so they could destroy them?”*

**Jacob Overson, Manager of the Baker Community Services District**

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*The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, a national non-profit organization that is recognized as the voice of experience, is deeply concerned about the impacts this photovoltaic generating facility will have on wildlife and wildlife habitat, scarce natural spring resources, and the future potential for the establishment of wildlife corridors between National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management administered lands. Certainly, within the vast area of consideration for this Photovoltaic project, there are areas that are less environmentally sensitive than as identified in the preferred alternative of the Soda Mountain Plan Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report.*

*The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees appeals to the leadership of the Bureau of Land Management to recognize the importance and sensitivity of this piece of the California Desert and instead elect to pursue the establishment of a Bureau of Land Management Area of Critical Environmental Concern. This action would protect wildlife habitat and provide for connectivity among the existing Bureau of Land Management Soda Mountain Wilderness, the Cady Mountain Wilderness, and the National Park Service, Mojave National Preserve.*

**Ernest “Ernie” Quintana, Coalition of National Park Service Retirees**

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*“The science community works closely with Interior to understand and conserve the spectacular resources in the California desert. That is why I can’t support a project that harms so much and offers so little in return. This technology could easily be moved to a better site in order to protect the diverse and federally-protected wildlife, springs, habitat, and future connectivity offered here. I join a community of scientists in calling for the Department to wake up and do the right thing.”*

**Ed LaRue Mojave-focused Wildlife Biologist**

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*“Our group resolved to oppose the Soda Mountain project due to the significant harm to National Parks, wilderness, wildlife, and recreation. It is obvious to everyone, including the BLM’s own advisors, that this project should be moved and that this special place should be protected as an ACEC due to its known important resources.”*

**Seth Shteir, Desert Advisory Council member**

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*“I make my living by connecting people to the Mojave desert and demonstrating its beauty through photography. When I learned that a place I love so much was being threatened, I camped on those public lands and photographed that wild and beautiful landscape. The Soda Mountains are rich, rugged, full of life, and an important link between Mojave National Preserve and the BLM Wilderness north. Knowing that the Department is choosing to move forward with this embarrassing project instead of protecting a place with known resources has ripped a hole in my heart. What a shame to choose politics over the protection of the public and our resources.”*

**Michael Gordon, Awarded landscape photographer and business owner**

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*“As a longtime partner with the Department, we continue to call for the protection of the Soda Mountain region from industrialization in order to protect crucial resources that we, the Department, and many others have worked together to protect through acquisition and conservation. The impacts of this project and known better locations make it an unnecessary sacrifice.”*

**Frazier Haney, Conservation Director for the Mojave Desert Land Trust**

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*“As a former Interior Department employee, I join the many who call on the Department to stand up and do the right thing by saying no to the harmful Soda Mountain Solar project and choosing a path that protects the public’s interest, protecting this landscape as an ACEC. This is a commonsense solution to an unnecessary problem. The Department understands that this project represents a bad decision and they are jeopardizing public trust and public resources by forwarding this harmful project.”*

**Mark Butler, Former Superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park**

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*“The Soda Mountain Solar project departs from the approach by President Obama and Interior Secretary Jewell to transition to clean energy in a responsible and guided way. Desert community residents and beyond are angered over this painfully bad idea, but remaining focused on protecting this place that we so deeply love, by asking the Interior Department to protect Soda Mountains with an ACEC designation. This is a watershed moment for the Department in the California Desert, and thousands of people are watching and waiting for the agency to make the right decision.”*

**David Lamfrom, California Desert Associate Director, National Parks Conservation Association**

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